

Water Restriction Bylaw Will Mean Fines

By CHRIS PECK

People who defy the town's conservation restrictions by watering their lawns everyday this summer or beyond the designated hours could face fines for the first time if a new bylaw is adopted at Town Meeting.

A \$50 fine for the first offense and a \$100 fine for each subsequent violation could be assessed by the Board of Water Commissioners should the water use restrictions become law. The new conservation measure is contained in Article 12 to be placed up for a vote at the March 9 Town Meeting.

Two members of the Board of Selectmen, Chairman Friend Weiler and Margaret Kearney have indicated some

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support for the measure but no formal vote was held following Monday night's public hearing.

Walter Tonaszuck, the director of public works, told the board that this bylaw would supply the "teeth" needed to force some of the biggest abusers of town water to comply with what are now voluntary restrictions.

Tonaszuck also said these stronger measures are necessary to bring Duxbury into compliance with state demands that the town's high level of water consumption be reduced. In 1995, Duxbury used 92 gallons per capita while the average is between 70 to 80.

"The development homes in Duxbury today are generally large and luxurious. A lot of these homes have in-ground sprinklers, which is the latest thing. It's on a computer. You set it once and you're done. What happens is an awful lot of water goes into the ground because of that," Tonaszuck said.

The restrictions would be the same as last year, residents of even numbered homes could water their lawns on Monday, Wednesday, and Saturday. Residents of odd numbered homes could water on Tuesday, Thursday, and Sunday, all between the hours of 6 to 9 am and 6 to 9 pm. No sprinklers could be used on Friday. The restrictions will probably be in effect from Memorial Day to Labor Day.

Police and municipal employees will be in charge of "observing" violators, according to Tonaszuck.

"We are not expecting a confrontation," he said, adding a note would be left on the person's door and a registered letter would then be sent. "We are not going to go out there and shut their water off but it is going to be very expensive," he said.

High water bills can also be a red flag, warning of potential violators, Tonaszuck said.

"Last summer there were a number of people watering in the dark, on both sides of the street," he said.

Kearney told Tonaszuck she has heard people with underground sprinklers argue their method of watering is more efficient but Tonaszuck said it is also more expensive.

He said the average family in Duxbury has a water bill of \$250 for summer use while someone with automatic sprinklers and one acre of lawn has a \$600 bill.

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Kearney also asked about the new, higher rate charged the town's largest water users and wondered if that had a

detering effect. In March, the board approved doubling the rate someone pays for water once they use more than 250,000 gallons, which Tonaszuck says affects mostly those with automatic sprinklers.

Tonaszuck said that second bill, reflecting the higher rate assessed last summer, has not been sent to all homeowners yet so it is too soon to tell. He added, however, sprinkler systems drawing on a private well are not subject to water restrictions.

The public hearing on the measure only drew 4 people and only 2 of those actually opposed it.

George Wadsworth, the chairman of the Water Advisory Board and a member of the town's Planning Board, said those boards had not taken a position but that he thought the restrictions were an overreaction.

"We get about 43 inches of rain per year here and 17 inches gets into the aquifer," Wadsworth said.

He also did not think raising the rate would deter people from keeping their lawns green. "Water consumption programs that are price sensitive have difficulty working because people will just generally pay the bill," he said.

Wadsworth said the water is recycled anyway. "The water we pump out of the ground largely goes back into the ground."

Tonaszuck noted 2 of the last 3 summers have been dry and have put a strain on the town's water resources.

"If we didn't have the cooperation of people in Duxbury, we would have had to declare a water emergency," he said.

The voluntary restrictions were announced with the explanation that the demand for water had begun to exceed the town's pumping ability from its wells. The public works director said an emergency would exist when the town could not supply enough drinking water or water for fire prevention.

Shawn Dahlen, the former conservation commissioner and a landscaping contractor, suggested one way to reduce peak demand on the pumps would be to allow homeowners with underground sprinklers to run them between 2 and 4 am. Dahlen said the early morning water reduces evaporation so more of the water can return to the ground.

"You are promoting use of water at peak times, the same time as when people are getting up to take a shower or are doing the laundry," he said.

Dahlen, whose business includes installing sprinkler systems, said he recommends that his customers sink a private well so they are not competing with the town's drinking water. He said the well can sometimes pay for itself in 2 to 3 years.

He also thought the restrictions were unnecessary. "I'm afraid this is taking a giant step when we can